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HARTFORD TOWN CLERK

**West Hartford Senior Citizens Advisory Commission
2017 Report to the West Hartford Town Council
Pursuant to WH Code Sec. 5-39**

I. Introduction

The West Hartford Senior Citizens Advisory Commission meets monthly, except for July and August, at the Elmwood Senior Center, at 10am on the mornings of the third Tuesday of the month. Commission meetings are open to the public. The Commission is comprised of nine members. Interested citizens are encouraged to apply to the Town Clerk's Office to be considered for membership. Philip Walker is Chair. Other members are Noreen Bachteler, Rosemary Cleary, Ray Guenter, Linda Hanson, Bob Kennedy, Ellen Phillips, and Donna Sterling. The Commission is fortunate and grateful to continue to have Amy Lynn Silverman as its Volunteer Secretary.

The Commission relies heavily on our liaison with several Town of West Hartford administrators who serve our senior citizens on a daily basis. Through them we are kept up to date on the interests and needs of our seniors and how they are being addressed. Each month the members look forward to hearing from Gina Marino, Director of the Senior Center at Bishops Corner, and from Kathleen Faroni, Director of the Elmwood Senior Center. Keren Paquette, of West Hartford Social Services, Kevin Farmer of ITN Central, and Sheila Diamond of the Seniors Job Bank also report at the meetings.

A key resource for us has been Mayor Shari Cantor, who continues to support the Commission. Mayor Cantor attends meetings as her schedule permits. Deputy Mayor Beth Kerrigan has filled in on occasion. The Commission appreciates their

attendance since they enable it to remain current with matters coming before the Town Council, particularly those affecting senior citizens.

This year, several Commission members attended state and local budget hearings. Members communicated concerns over tax increases that impact seniors substantially, particularly those on a fixed income.

II. Seniors Job Bank

Last year the Commission continued its support for the Seniors Job Bank. This resource is important, both for seniors who need its services and those able to provide them. The Commission appreciates reports from Jim Doran and SJB's Executive Director, Sheila Diamond. A part-time assistant has been added to the SJB staff. During this past year, job referrals through the SJB were up over 50% from the previous year. The Town Council formally congratulated Bob Cave for his leadership in reestablishing the Senior Job Bank. SJB's fund raising efforts have been helped by a challenge grant from Jim Doran.

III. Senior Transportation Needs

Providing adequate transportation services for West Hartford seniors has been a priority for the Commission. Our retiring Commission member, Ruth Kurien, is on the board of ITN Central, a significant transportation option for seniors. ITN's Executive Director, Kevin Farmer, attends Commission meetings. ITN has been quite successful during this past year in adding drivers and increasing ridership significantly. Drivers receive training on a quarterly basis. A \$10,000 grant from the Hartford Foundation has helped, as has a grant from the West Hartford Rotary to

assist low-income riders. Under Kevin's leadership, word about the service of ITN has spread through local media.

IV. Communications with Seniors

The Commission makes a special effort to communicate with West Hartford seniors and to hear from them concerning their needs and interests. As noted previously, it greatly appreciates the briefings from our Senior Center Directors, Gina Marino and Kathleen Faroni, concerning events and activities at their respective Senior Centers. Several Commission members have signed up as Senior Center members and frequently attend events at the Centers, including lunches to recognize and honor their volunteers. This enables Commission members to hear directly from seniors about programs that affect them, or future ones that may have this potential.

The Commission appreciates what the West Hartford Park system means for seniors. Phil Walker and Bob Kennedy continued to attend meetings on the rehabilitation of Wolcott Park. A presentation was made by three individuals who advocated for increasing the opportunities for "pickle ball." The Commission plans to schedule further discussion in 2018 with those advocates and a representative of the Park Department.

V. Special Guests

The Commission's January meeting was attended by two members of the Town Council, Dallas Dodge and Chris Williams. Commission members are always honored to have members of the Council as guests at meetings and hope that as many members as possible will attend future meetings. As a Commission charged with the duty to advise the Council on senior matters, it is extremely useful to have

periodic face-to-face contact with Council members. Ed Sanady, Human Services Manager, who retired later in the year, attended the March meeting to discuss the Town's programs and services for the home bound, a particular concern of the Commission.

At its April meeting, the Commission had the opportunity of hearing from Senator Beth Bye and Representative Derrick Slap. An open and candid discussion regarding the serious financial issues facing not only the state of Connecticut but the Town as well, took place. A focal point was the effect of ever-increasing taxes and living costs on seniors, many of whom are on a fixed income. The Commission appreciates that both Senator Bye and Representative Slap understand this situation and are doing their best to deal with these problems.

The Commission is alarmed over the impact the opioid crisis has had on seniors. Joe Kalache and Mitchel Irving of West Hartford Social Services spoke on this issue at the November meeting. Seniors are not immune from this scourge.

The Honorable Owen Eagan, West Hartford Probate Judge, spoke at the December meeting. Judge Eagan described the overall functioning of the Court and its responsibility for processing decedent's estates and its other roles such as dealing with issues involving competency.

VI. Conclusion

The members of the Commission are dedicated to service to the Town of West Hartford and its senior citizens. Members experience a large measure of personal satisfaction from their role. The years of growing old may not always be golden but they can be brightened by the caring concerns of those within and outside of the Town administration. The Commission intends to do its part to promote those

"caring concerns." Toward this end, the Commission is always available to meet with the Council and/or any of its individuals and with Town officials.

Respectfully submitted,

West Hartford Senior Citizens Advisory Commission

By _____

Philip S. Walker, its Chair
December 31, 2017